



Conference brief:

Strategies of the political parties in North Macedonia for enhancing women's political participation — 2024

This brief is a product of the conference on “Violence Against Women in Politics - Solutions for Enhancing Women’s Political Participation”, which was held on 9 February 2024, in Skopje. The event was organized by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), in partnership with the Institute for Communication Studies (ICS), and with the support of the British Embassy.

At the conference, in addition to the guest of honour speaker - the Member of the Parliament (MP) of United Kingdom, Mrs. Yasmin Qureshi, the conference was also attended by representatives of several political parties in North Macedonia, along with academics, researchers and experts from the civil society. The event served as a platform for discussion on the role of political party funding for increasing gender equality, the impact of media narratives on violence against women in politics, identifying existing barriers in the country, as well as finding effective solutions for enhancing the representation of women in politics.

The purpose of this brief was to serve as a tool for monitoring and driving the future strategies of political parties in North Macedonia in the direction of greater participation of women in politics.

Key findings from the discussion



Positive practice from United Kingdom

- ✓ As a result of the advocacy by the feminist movement for equal representation of women in politics, and the introduction of gender quotas and open lists, the number of women in the British Parliament doubled in the 1997 election;
- ✓ A noteworthy practice is the provision of trainings of women for ensuring greater inclusion and participation in politics. One of the parties, for example, provides trainings across the country, conducted by experts and former MPs, to guide women through the process of running campaigns, strengthening the necessary skills, logistics, etc. as well as a leadership program for women members, which aims to encourage and train women in leadership roles;
- ✓ Women are more often the subject of harassment on social media, as opposed to men. Harassment of women, which is mostly of a sexual nature, is one of the barriers to the inclusion of women in politics. Hence, it is necessary to ensure conditions in which women do not feel threatened to get involved in politics. Thus, for example, a party from the UK has established a formal procedure for protection against sexual harassment, where the steps and contacts for confidential reporting and protection against sexual harassment are clearly stated;
- ✓ If a woman has a child to take care of and cannot come to the parliament to vote, in the UK there is a system of proxy voting, that is, one of her colleagues can vote on her behalf.
- ✓ The increasing presence of women in politics is proving to be particularly significant in raising awareness about certain topics and enacting laws that are important to women.

Funding of political parties to increase gender equality

- ✓ Financial support is one of the prerequisites for women to be able to get involved in various political campaigns, to be active and successful. Traditional gender roles and social expectations can significantly hinder women's access to financial resources in politics, and in some countries the legislation itself does not support the funding of women's political participation;
- ✓ The introduction of quotas in many countries has contributed to increasing the participation of women, but

they are not enough to ensure true representation and have their voice heard in the political arena;

- ✓ In many countries, campaign financing relies heavily on private donations, which can favour candidates with great personal wealth or access to rich political networks, areas where women are often at a disadvantage;
- ✓ Women on average earn less than men, which can make it difficult for them to self-finance campaigns or contribute to political parties;
- ✓ Political parties are less likely to support female candidates financially and organizationally, often due to perceived electoral risks or prejudice regarding women's leadership abilities;
- ✓ Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including reforming campaign funding laws to level the playing field, provide resources, and change societal attitudes about women candidates.

Role of the media on violence against women in politics

- ✓ The media use and confirm gender stereotypes, including the participation of women in politics, thus contributing to the normalization of the culture of gender-based violence,
- ✓ Anti-gender narratives are widely represented in the media, which leads to the spread of gender misinformation aimed at damaging the reputation of female politicians, belittling their personality and abilities, etc., the ultimate goal of which is to exclude women from public discourse;
- ✓ Publications of news reports on social media are used to create and spread gender misinformation, and are a fertile ground for gender-based hate speech and harassment.
- ✓ It is necessary for the media to create and market content to raise awareness about the negative effects of gender-based violence and promote the principle of gender equality.

Conditions and barriers for women's participation in politics in North Macedonia

- ✓ Discrimination against women in politics is still present in the country. The most critical is the local level where there are no gender quotas and where the representation

of women is the lowest, with 36.5% female councillors and 2.5% female mayors. This gender discrepancy is present in all parties, both at the level of political party municipal organizations and in the parties' central bodies;

- ✓ In recent years, there has been some equal representation of women, primarily due to respecting the legal norms, however equal representation of women in political parties is still absent;
- ✓ Traditional and religious factors still have a significant influence on women's participation in politics;
- ✓ Social and economic aspects are essential for women's entry into politics, especially at the local level, since one

of the key factors for women in politics is their access to financial resources;

- ✓ It is necessary to work on improving the political party statutes in the direction of strengthening the position of women in the party, for example through the introduction of gender quotas at different party levels and structures;
- ✓ It is necessary to improve the statutory position of women's forums, especially from the aspect of their financial independence;
- ✓ It is necessary to improve the image of political parties, which is significant for the inclusion and promotion of women in politics, especially at the local level.

Commitments of political parties



Bearing in mind their role for the participation of women in politics, the political parties in North Macedonia in their presentations at the conference expressed their commitment to ensuring greater representation and participation of women in politics. Their presentations are summarized below:

- ✓ Incorporating the principle of gender equality into policies and programs, as one of the party's priorities;
- ✓ Defining and/or increasing the internal gender quotas within the Party Statutes from 40% to 50% in the direction of ensuring greater representation of women at all levels of the party's bodies;
- ✓ Increasing the gender quotas to 50% for the representation of women on the parliamentary lists;
- ✓ Introduction of gender quotas for greater representation of women in ministerial positions in the executive power;
- ✓ Introducing and/or increasing gender quotas to 50% for the representation of women in elections at the local level, including women running for mayors;
- ✓ Designing initiatives and amendments for promoting the legislation. Some parties advocate for one electoral unit with open lists, with an equal number of representation of women and men;
- ✓ Greater participation in the process of making party decisions and strengthening the financial independence of women's forums in the political parties, as well as strengthening their role, through drafting strategic guidelines and activities;
- ✓ Encouraging and inviting women to become actively involved in political life and building their capacities,

through training and mentoring in cooperation with organizations and parties;

- ✓ Promoting and increasing the visibility of women in politics, especially by appointing them as lead candidates on the candidate lists, as well as promoting success stories of women in politics;
- ✓ Introducing measures for prevention and protection against discrimination and various forms of violence through the party's code of conduct and intra-party activities for prevention, with the aim of enabling a safe environment for women in the political party and politics in general;
- ✓ Application of positive campaign techniques and use of gender-sensitive political speech;
- ✓ Greater participation of male party members in promoting and supporting gender equality in political parties and in politics in general;
- ✓ Some of the parties recognize the need for a balance between the professional and private life and the pressure that is much greater for women in politics.

General guidelines for political parties for enhancing women's political participation



- ✓ External and/or internal evaluation of political party documents, procedures, as well as internal party culture from a gender perspective and identification of discriminatory elements and practices, as well as evaluation of the needs of women members of the political party;
- ✓ Institutionalizing the principle of gender equality in political parties which entails revising internal documents, including the Party Statute, procedures and party structure at all levels;
- ✓ Promoting greater intra-party democracy, with women occupying more essential roles in the political parties, through the introduction of gender quotas and/or their increase to 50% in all party bodies;
- ✓ Introducing gender quotas of 50% for the candidacy of women in elections, including at the local level, i.e. where there are no legal gender quotas, and avoiding the use of women candidates only to fill candidate positions that are estimated not to receive enough votes;
- ✓ Developing party strategies and action plans for gender equality with clear goals, activities, time frames and adequate financial resources for their accomplishment, as well as conducting mandatory monitoring and evaluation of their implementation in practice;
- ✓ Keeping and regularly renewing gender-disaggregated data in the parties, in order to monitor trends, identify old-new gender gaps and evaluate the effects of applying certain gender measures;
- ✓ Establishing and/or strengthening the role of women's forums within the political parties, through their formalization, financial independence and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes at the level of the entire party;
- ✓ Introduction of measures for transparent and fair distribution of resources in the political party, especially for access to resources needed for conducting successful election campaigns;
- ✓ Ensuring adequate visibility of women during election campaigns, media presence, sharing expertise, party materials, etc., as well as supporting and promoting role models of women within the political party;
- ✓ Use of gender-sensitive rhetoric at the party level, which is not based on gender stereotypes and which supports and promotes women's participation in political life;
- ✓ Developing internal mechanisms for the protection of women and promotion of narratives to encourage positive attitudes about women in politics;
- ✓ Organizing and implementing specialized training and mentoring programs for women for capacity building, preparation of candidacies, fundraising, public speaking, campaigning, etc.
- ✓ Establishing partnership cooperation with organizations in building capacities for the promotion and implementation of the principle of gender equality in their work;
- ✓ Ensuring a safe environment for women members of the political party by establishing clear bans for the use of any form of gender-based discrimination and violence and gender-based hate speech and appropriate sanctioning, as well as by publicly appealing to refrain from any form of gender-based violence and hate speech;
- ✓ Introducing measures for better balancing between the private and professional life, which will not jeopardize the participation of women in the political party and the political processes in general. In this direction, measures such as the possibility of participation and voting electronically or through an intermediary, provision of child care premises and workers, adaptation of events to the needs of women, flexible work obligations, etc., could be envisaged.
- ✓ Proposing changes and adopting legislation aimed at promoting women's participation in politics and gender conditioning of the public funding of political parties, such as the Electoral Code, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Financing Political Parties, etc.